

# **DEHUMANIZATION IN WAR AND COMBAT: RHETORIC AND PRACTICE**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Undergraduate Research Scholars program at  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by Research Advisor:

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May 2017

Major: English

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Dehumanization in War and Combat: Rhetoric and Practice**

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This research addressed dehumanization in times of war by considering the discourses of veterans from conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. I will analyze sources of non-fiction and fiction literature, and interviews archived in *After Combat: The Voices Project* of soldiers' and veterans' spoken words and tones to grasp the concept of dehumanization in a war setting. I define dehumanization in formal and colloquial terms to situate my research method in rhetorical analysis. I derived a theory I call the Dismembered while analyzing the sources listed above. I will discuss and define my theory of the Dismembered as persons who are no longer considered part of the collective that is human; as well as the theory having basis in Judith Butler's account of precarious life, and other influences.

My research evaluates whether the process of dehumanizing military combatants, or the "enemy," is a manifestation of military culture or a social exaggeration generated by civilians viewing war from an outsider's perspective. This work is particularly crucial given the image the United States projects to the rest of the world, and specifically given the impact the military extends in shaping the image of the United States. Thus, the possible civilian communication about soldiers dehumanizing people could misrepresent the truth of military duty and life in war

settings. From my research, I hope to gain an accurate definition of dehumanization in areas and times of war, and what in such setting generates the rhetoric that results in the dehumanization of the opposition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Marian Eide and Matthew Bizzell, M.A. for the opportunity to learn from them, and their wisdom and guidance throughout the course of this research.

Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues and the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a tremendous experience. I also want to extend my gratitude to the men and women of the United States military for sharing their stories and oral histories with the *After Combat: The Voice Project* team.

Finally, thanks to my mother and father for their unwavering support and encouragement with this endeavor.

## INTRODUCTION

Working on the *After Combat: The Voices Project* inspired me to believe in the need for stories of war and combat to be available for those who are also seeking a realistic interpretation of the military culture. The project archives interviews with “men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan from the first invasions to the most recent collaborations with local armies.”

Positing a need to distinguish between realistic accounts and popular culture sensationalism, often proliferated by mass media, I focused on parts of military culture that are difficult to read and even harder to hear, delving into these difficult conversations and reading to understand more about the exclusive group of the United States military. I chose to investigate the nature of the rhetoric behind dehumanization in the military. I sought to go beyond the cinema portrayals of basic training, typified by the rhetoric of “maggot,” and the like, and focus on veteran stories of present combat.

I conducted my research through rhetorical analysis of literary works of non-fiction and fiction to thoroughly gauge what has been experienced and stated, and what has been imagined about military life – especially in times of combat. I will discuss my analysis of diction, figures of speech, and tone as the main variables of my rhetorical focus – while also considering the setting and attitude of the persons and characters involved of the story being analyzed, to examine the trend of dehumanization within military culture.

In the chapters below, I will quote and analyze oral narratives from in the *After Combat: The Voices Project* database in addition to the literary analysis. I will indicate the origin of the quotes, and whether they are of fiction or non-fiction. I will further extrapolate on the multiple meanings of the quotations and arguments by closely analyzing the interviewees' diction, tone, hesitations, and my own response to the material. Thus, I will discuss why the quotations constitute as dehumanizing statements.

Ultimately, the purpose of this thesis is to gain a more detailed understanding of the origins dehumanizing rhetoric in the United States military and why is it still used in contemporary ages of present combat. I conclude that dehumanization is propagated by a dominant national culture and the subculture within the United States military, rather than the sensationalistic popular culture of civilians and mass media. I will explain my findings in the chapters below and the offer an idea of reconciliation – Remembering the people of the Dismembered.

# CHAPTER I

## DISTINCTIONS

### Defining Dehumanization

By definition, to dehumanize means “to deprive of human character or attributes” (OED). However, among scholars and researchers the way in which the word is instituted varies to include physical violence, deprivation of lawful rights, or callous and crude words – I choose to focus on the rhetoric of all three. To define dehumanization, I register what is considered human to understand how a person can deprive another person of such “human character or attributes” (OED). For most sources, being human involves *membership*, being a part of a species, a nation, or a community. To dehumanize, then, is to deny membership, a process I describe with reference to its physical correlate as “dismembering.” Thus, I began looking for rhetorical evidence that dehumanizing is to make another person, who is innately a part of the species, feel completely separate from the rest of the *Homo Sapiens*. Throughout my thesis, I will call dehumanized persons the Dismembered.<sup>1</sup>

Judith Butler in her collection of essays titled *Precarious Life*, focuses on “how easily human life is annulled” through the exploration of various interpretations of what qualifies life and how other people justify life becoming precarious life (Butler XVIII). Judith Butler provides an intense example of the “dehumanization effected by ‘indefinite detention’” on the prisoners of Guantanamo – that it is an “ethnic frame work for conceiving who will be human, and who will not” (Butler XVI). She explains that “the humans who are imprisoned in Guantanamo do not

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<sup>1</sup> I capitalized Dismembered because I will use this word as a descriptor and a categorical label for person who are no longer considered human, thus no longer a member of humanity.



count as human; they are not subjects protected by international law. They are not subjects in “any legal or normative sense” (Butler, XVI). Butler goes on to explain indefinite detention and the issues of sovereignty when a person “falls outside the ‘human’ as it has been naturalized in its ‘Western’ mold” (Butler 32). She draws parallels from dehumanized persons of war, the discrimination of sexual minorities, and the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. She explains the violence against these groups and the deprivation of human decency. Butler states these groups and others in the same likeness that are in the social scope and public sphere “cannot be mourned because they were always lost or, rather, never ‘were’” (33). Butler’s ideology aligns with my observation that dehumanization occurs when humans are denied membership in the species or community.

To emphasize the importance of a “keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold” so inclusion in communities to happen, Butler draws on Emmanuel Levinas’, “conception of ethics that rest upon an apprehension of the precariousness of life, one that begins with precarious life of the Other” (Butler XVII - XVIII). Levinas uses “Other” as the grouping for people who are not included within a community, sect, or society (Butler XVIII). He gives the “Other” the idea of “face” that “communicates what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable” (Butler XVIII). Butler introduces the importance of mourning with the “Levinasian face” of people who are “presented to us a so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed” (Butler XVIII). Butler discusses the need for the “capacity to mourn” or “we lose that keener sense of life we need to oppose violence” and precarious life (Butler XVIII).

Levinas' "Other" and Butler's call to a "keener sense of life" is applicable to various methods of dehumanizing on a day to day basis. One way is the pervasive imagery of advertising in America, with its literal focus on the human body. The type of advertising that permeates American media is highly sexualized and centers on objectification, particularly of women. The ad strategy focuses on the presence or absence of female appendages, and thus called "dismemberment advertising"<sup>2</sup> (Rudman, Akiko). The women of these are dismembered because their body parts and appendages are the focus of the ad – and not the woman as a collective whole – thus the humanity of these women and their appendages are separated from their person. Ultimately, these hyper-sexualized women are not recognized as part of the collective human species.

### **Dehumanizing in War Literature**

Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds* tells a story of two young privates' military service and surviving in Iraq in the spring of 2004, and the ramifications of their actions. The novel provides insight to the experiences of soldiers in combat areas and the style of life that is a part of war, as told in retrospect from the character John Bartle. The title *The Yellow Birds* derives from the "Traditional U.S. Army Marching Cadence" Powers includes in his epigraph, which says

A yellow bird  
With a yellow bill  
Was perched upon  
My windowsill

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<sup>2</sup> From the media taking women a part piece by piece until they also are not recognized as human. I adapted this advertising strategy to form the term Dismembered.

I lured him in  
With a piece of bread  
And then I smashed  
His fucking head...

The cadence addresses the subculture of the U.S. military as Powers understood, primarily inciting violence, the mentality of the Armed Forces, as well as foreshadows the intense and unrelenting cultural change the two privates will incur.

Early in the novel Bartle states that “[n]othing made us special. Not living. Not dying. Not being ordinary” (Powers, 14). Bartle expresses his dislike of the army defining him and his comrade Murphy as two of the many dispensable soldiers in the Armed Forces. Bartle’s “being ordinary” is his interpretation of being a member in a community (Powers 14). He sees himself as an American, a soldier, as a human in this moment, but the Army withdraws this sense of inclusion and humanity to redefine him as an instrument at the Army’s disposal.

The quotation above shortly precedes the death of a local Iraqi women caught in the cross fire of U.S. Army soldiers, one of whom “did not stop shooting” (Powers 22). The loss of life and the carnage inflicted upon the women and her car only instigated the comment from Murphy: “Holy shit, that bitch just got murdered” (Powers 22). Bartle recounts that “there was no grief, or anguish, or joy, or pity” in Murphy’s response. Rather, Murphy was “just surprised, like he was waking up from an afternoon nap” (Powers 22). The extensive exposure to the death and revoking life leaves Murphy, probably among other soldiers of this platoon, to experience brutal

loss of life as trivial happenings in their day to day lives – such as “waking up from an afternoon nap” (Powers 22).

The descriptor “bitch” Murphy uses for the Iraqi woman dehumanizes because it degrades and turns her womanhood into a derogatory and shameful quality. The term functions to objectify the woman. She does not remain a woman upon death, she becomes a “that” and a “bitch.” The connotation of bitch, as applied to humans, is malicious. Murphy uses “bitch” to villainize the woman and her culture, bitch is “the female of the dog or some other carnivorous mammals,” therefore it is literally not human (Merriam – Webster). Bartle states that Murphy “spoke the truth,” indicating that “none of it really seemed to matter much at all;” woman dying, the platoon members not expressing grief because the woman is no longer a member of humanity – she is among the Dismembered (Power 22).

Powers utilizes intense and severe language likely exchanged among soldiers during Powers’s service in Iraq in 2004 and 2005. In the following quotation Powers emphasizes the ability of a person to separate the human characteristics from the body of a person—or belittle them to crude outlines that enable another to complete an action. ““Shoot these hajji fucks!” shouts Sterling, Powers’s most profane character, riling up his men at the start of a firefight in Iraq (Powers 19). The juxtaposition of “hajji” to the expletive “fuck” by proximity enables “hajji” to become just as severe an expletive, though making hajj is a revered practice in Islam and Islamic cultures. In this instance, Sterling turns the Iraqi people into flesh targets, thus dismembering their humanity reducing their spiritual state to “precarious life,” as Butler would call it, to merely their body.

Powers deliberately chose such language to convey the shocking reality that transpires in combat and war.

Powers models his John Bartle character after Herman Melville's Bartleby from *Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*. Melville writes his Bartleby in a setting of great power, Wall Street, but labors over writing that, to Bartleby, lacks meaning. The toiling one day ends and Bartleby says the infamous line, "I would prefer not to," at the demand or request of anyone (Melville 7). Powers also places John Bartle into an area of importance in Bartle's time. Bartle's interest similarly declines in his purpose because he realizes his mission leaves persons Dismembered. Both characters feeling apathetic towards living leads them to take measures towards ending their life. Powers diverges here and Bartle lives to the end of the novel.

An influence on Bartle is Sterling, who epitomizes dehumanizing in times of combat, and in times of respite. The main character, who controls the narrative perspective, Bartle states of Sterling "I hated the way he excelled in death and brutality and domination." This quote indicates the choice Sterling's name is ironic in that that he is excellent at physically dismembering and, through domination, of severing others from their humanity. Rank and demeanor place Sterling in a position of influence among the men of the unit, but the exposure to such obscene language and gore makes Sterling essential to combat, which Bartle describes in his thought, "I hated the way he was necessary, how I need him to jar me into action...how I felt like a coward until he screamed in my ear" (Powers 20). Bartle finds his feeling of cowardice in a naturally frightening situation as a factor that could dismember him from his comrades who are also trying to emulate the Sterling standard. Feeling cowardice is wrong, fear of killing is weak

originates from the violence in the war culture that saturates the daily lives of these soldiers. The longer they force themselves to believe the local combatants are beneath them and inhuman to function in their culture, the more that the soldiers will accept that the Iraqi people are indeed no longer human. The Army prides itself on efficiency and the presence of grief and mourning is not efficient for war. This quote also speaks to the hyper-masculinity infamous to the culture the Army. The idea of a soldier being impervious and brave is a traditional value within the United States military, just as the idea of vulnerability is shameful to men in American culture. I will further discuss the idea that cowardice is a form of weakness in times of combat in later chapters.

Investigating the rhetoric used to dehumanization lead to me to question what to call a person or persons who endure another person depriving their human characteristics and dignity; and metaphorically, perhaps physically too, casting them outside of a community – ultimately denying them membership. My investigation leads me to that a person who suffers dehumanization is reduced only pieces of them self that are hated, feared, misconstrued, or in advertising lusted over. I call these persons the Dismembered. The term also serves as a double entendre: first, physical dismemberment and second, the usurping the membership in humanity - disconnecting basic human decency and attributes indicating belonging to the human population. Textual examples will be used to extrapolate this concept in following chapters.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **DISMEMBERING**

In this chapter I will discuss the testimony from actual soldiers and discussing the language used to indicate dehumanization and identify the Dismembered. I will also relate these quotes back to the literature discussed above when appropriate.

#### **Exceptionalism**

A soldier, Dave 1, stated in an *After Combat: The Voice Project* interview: “unfortunately, the majority of my comrades ...their attitude towards the Arabs was more simplistic and almost racist ... in some cases it was very racist.” During the deployment, the soldier concedes “there’s this absolute disregard for them as human beings” and the dialogue is more like “Look at the ‘towel heads’ over there thinking they’re going to be like Americans blah blah blah” (Dave 1). The idea these soldiers “don’t tend to look at the culture as a viable culture, more as a just antagonistic culture” (Dave 1) echoes to the concept of American Exceptionalism – the idea that America “believes itself exceptional, the greatest and noblest nation ever to exist, a lone champion standing between the white city of democracy and the terrorists, despots, barbarians and other enemies of civilization.” (Coates 8). The soldier’s comrades pejoratively describe Arab people as “towel heads,” which dismembers them from people and furthermore Americans. The “blah blah blah” following “to be like Americans” suggests that even the soldier giving the interview thinks that solely saying “American” that we as interviewers understand the connotation of the word (Dave 1).

The “assert[ion] of US priority and US omnipotence,” (9) as Butler defines American Exceptionalism, of democracy as the epitome of peace and true civilization persists in the interview with the soldier describing his comrades mocking how the Arab people “want the Arab Spring” and the Arabs “get democracy” only to “see how well they screw that up” (Dave 1). The shared mentality among the soldier’s comrades that building democracy is futile in such Dismembered countries because it can never live up the American way of surviving accentuates the exceptionalism that the group of soldiers exudes. One might argue that the “Arab Spring” happened without the context of democratic institutions – the necessary structures that initially established American democracy (Dave 1). The perception of the culture these soldiers are in echoes back to Butler’s conception of the “Western Mold” and those who “fall outside” such a “Mold” are Dismembered (Butler 32).

This section of the soldier imparting his experience is precise in not including his personal involvement and views, only the observations of his fellow soldiers. The presence of quantifiers of “almost racist” and “very racist,” and the descriptor of the quote above as “one of those” indicates a tentative defense of his comrades because they are the soldier’s comrades and they fight together but their words and views are wrong (Dave 1). Like Coates said, “One cannot, at once, claim to be superhuman and then plead mortal error” (8).

### **The Easiness**

While volunteering an oral history, another soldier, Dave 2, shares her “biggest regret...about deployment” – she explains the story as “the one that kind of haunts me.” She starts her story with a sense of urgency:



One night we showed up in this town, and we were in the wrong compound...it was actually a school, a madrasa, a religious school for boys, all young, all somewhere between the ages of six and twelve...I realized we have a very limited amount of time before the helicopters come back to pick us up. So, I went over to the group of boys...I pulled the card that I thought would work with this group of particular people, little boys: "which one of you is the bravest?" All the little boys start jumping up and down; they're waving their little arms, and they want to be the one to talk to me. So I pull one over to the side, and I start trying to figure out where the bad guy really is. So he starts talking to me, and I can tell he's scared, so I know we're kind of on the right track. I can tell that the closer I get to asking questions about this man that we're trying to get, the more he doesn't want to talk to me, so I don't have the time to deal with him, so I bring him back to the group. I tell the whole group of little boys that this little boy's a coward, and that I need someone who is really a man, the one who is the bravest, the true man in this group, to talk to me. So another one volunteers, I bring him over, and he agrees to lead me to where the insurgent who we were looking for, who happened to be a high level Taliban commander, which compound he was in. It was a small Afghan village, and everyone knew everything that was happening, so he knew exactly where to take me. Once we got there, the little boy wanted to leave; he was scared. He didn't want to stick around. So, we actually didn't find the guy. We found out later that he was hiding in the well...maybe fifty feet, I don't know exactly how deep it was, but our dogs didn't find him; we didn't find him...the way the Taliban works is after the Americans come to a compound and do something like we did, higher level leaders or the Taliban for the town come around to that compound the next day, and they ask basically: What did the Americans want? Why were they here? What did they say to you? What did they take? We found out that the family that was living there told the Taliban that that little boy ratted them out. I found this out two days later, that they executed the little boy that I chose to bring into that compound...I could have affected the situation, had I really been thinking of him as a person and not just as an intelligence asset. What I realize now is how easily people stop looking at other people as humans, especially if they're from a really different culture, like the Afghans are, there's nothing familiar about that culture; there's just nothing that seems even remotely similar to ours...I just think I stopped caring about them, really, about their well-being (Dave 2).

While conducting this interview, I took note of her articulation throughout the entire interview, but noticed that the pace of telling the story changed with the subject matter. The story was told at a mediated, normal conversational pace until Dave 2 says, "I realized we have a very limited time before the helicopters come back to pick us up." At this moment, she quickens her pace – there is frustration in her tone vaguely resembling the frustration she is enduring in the story. There is another tone and pace shift when she mentions "the little boy wanted to leave; he was

scared” (Dave 2). This is the only time in the interview that she sighs. She slows down the pace of the story, she sounds more reflective and shameful as she continues. Her sentences become more segmented as she reveals the mission was unsuccessful. She only pauses three times during the story: the first between “they executed the little boy” and “that I chose to bring to that compound, the second pause follows the second quotation (Dave 2). The third pause is noticeably the longest, following when she saw the boy an “intelligence asset” during the mission (Dave 2). I describe this pause as the moment of silence. Neither Dr. Eide or myself spoke to break the silence. The moment served as a silent reminder of regret but an opportunity to mourn for the boy – for all of us.

Dave 2 tells us she was “too high off the thrill” of gaining essential information to recognize the people around her as members of a community, especially the boy. She persistently devalued the humanity of the boy, making him valuable as a piece of equipment is valuable. Dave 2 also Dismembered the boy from his “small Afghan village,” his community, in two parts. She pulls “the card” that “would work with this group of particular people, little boys:” the call to bravery and manhood (Dave 2). She allowed herself to use these little boy’s hyper-masculine culture as a strategy in a high stakes card game that she feels she needed to risk the lives of little boys to win. She deliberately Dismembered him from his community by appealing to a serious element of these boy’s culture and community – a grim irony. Dave 2 also does not allow the boy to leave – just in case either his initial intelligence was false or in the event that he can provide more intelligence. Dave 2 shared that with the size of the village “everyone knew everything that was happening.” She allows the boy to be seen as the one “who narced, that he was the one who tattle-taled” (Dave 2). In the famous chess match named "Immortal Zugzwang Game" the final

position of the game is called "zugzwang," where the opponent must make a move but in doing so will only worsen their situation - ultimately, they cannot win. Dave 2 also calculated decisions to achieve the goal of their mission, but it seems she ultimately places the boy in a position of zugzwang, even though she does not truly realize what she is doing at the time. Allowing the boy to be seen, Dave 2 allows him to be rejected as a member of a small, private, scared community. When she and the "strike force" left "empty handed that night," they did not win, but the boy was the losing piece in that's nights war game.

My response was wonder. How could something so obvious become so obsolete? She's dealing with people, frightened people. I also allowed myself to disagree with Dave 2's statement "there's nothing familiar about that culture; there's just nothing that seems even remotely similar to ours." I concede that American culture is in many ways more progressive, especially with gender roles, however hyper-masculinity and bravery is still an idealized trait in American men as in little Afghan boys. Recall my analysis in Chapter I with John Bartle as an American needs to exude manliness in the form of bravery, these little boys feel compelled to do the same. I also wonder about the boy and war. I wonder what the boy would have said if I asked what is like being a human-piece in the game of war? Wanting to understand further, we continued to ask Dave 2 how she feels and how she's handling the outcome.

Reflecting on the mission, Dave 2 addresses "how easily you can get sucked into the dehumanization." She shares "I did have to seek counseling after this when I got back" (Dave 2). She relays the anger she feels and the disgust in herself for allowing herself to reach the capability of dehumanizing people. Dave 2 repeats the idea several times that "it's just so easy."

She cautions us that “you have to be on guard and watch yourself” and she watches herself because she wants this to end for everyone, especially the Dismembered (Dave 2).

This interview was the defining moment that I fully understood the importance of grieving and mourning. Also at this moment I considered the possibility of Dismembered people reentering into the humanity – a kind of Remembering<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Feeling**

In another interview, Dave 3 imparts “during training you’re taught that these people are not human, I guess...and it definitely kicks in.” “They” being the people of the countries the U.S. military is attempting to make or keep peace (Dave 3). In training, the dehumanization is out of utility to not feel guilt or expend the effort caring. The soldier was prepositioned to feel that people that lay there were among the Dismembered because they were never a member of the human community, and according to Butler “never ‘were’” because you can never mourn what never was (Butler, 33). Dave 3 elaborates that from training “seeing dead bodies didn’t really affect me or anybody else that I know of.” The training taught there was no room or time to care, because military efficiency is key and being staggered with grief is not an efficient way to win a war.

Dave 3 also describes a “kind of upset and pissed off” feeling with the soldiers unable to recognize other people as human, whether they are dead or alive. Another interviewee soldier, Dave 4, shares the aghast feeling with persons becoming Dismembered. Dave 4 explains “I’m a

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<sup>3</sup> I chose to capitalize Remember because the term is action and the title for Dismembered person or persons who reclaim status in collective humanity.

little different in my perspective now than probably other soldiers.” He deliberately chose to say “now” to indicate he belonged to the group think of “other soldiers” (Dave 4). He recounts an observation saying,

One thing that I saw was the brutality of the U.S. soldiers to the Iraqi people, which probably won’t hear that much...there was taunting. It really gave me a perspective of, like, this is really a war (Dave 4).

His conception of war changed at this moment. Dave 4 shares,

all else aside, this war is about two cultures, two societies, two types of people, who have bad blood toward each other. I’ve learned there’s always going to be that as long as there’s man, because we’re not perfect...how far does humanity take hate and tyranny? Yeah, we’re fighting against it, but it’s another thing when we demonstrate it to other people.

This quote echoes to Judith Butler’s calling attention to the hypocrisy of America as a collective nation that “our acts are not considered terrorist” and the soldier calls direct attention to this mentality during his service (Butler 6) and her “Western mold” concept that a person who “falls outside” is not human (32). The imposing of such standard, to be considered, creates the dichotomy of the cultures and war persists, as the soldiers explains.

Dave 4 elaborates on his comrades also sharing their perception “well, they deserve it.” According to his fellow servicemen, all the “brutality” and dehumanization toward the Iraqi people is valid and deserved action (Dave 4). However, Dave 4 creates his own dichotomy in his community with saying “well, no, they’re still human being and we need to respect them as such.” Dave 4 concedes “it’s not very popular” but reaffirms “it’s the truth.”

The feeling of being “kind of pissed off” is a shared theme among the soldiers’ interviews (Dave 3). They are angry that dehumanization occurs and people become Dismembered, but they all concede dehumanizing is “just so easy” because not recognizing people as valid humans is less effort than to recognizing all their value – it would make some military tasks much more difficult (Dave 2). However easy dehumanizing can be, living with the actions that brought someone to be Dismembered is the exact opposite of easy.

Kevin Powers relays the angst and true feeling of “pissed off” at one’s self in a stream of consciousness via John Bartle (Dave 3). He says, “I feel like I’m being eaten from the inside out and I can’t tell anyone” because everyone he encounters is grateful to the service he provided his country (Powers 144). To himself he says, “they should hate me for what I’ve done” (Powers 144). This confession opens the door to how Bartle feels about all his service and actions:

There isn’t making up for killing women or watching women get killed, or for that matter killing men and shooting them in the back and shooting them more times than necessary to actually kill them and it was like there was acid seeping down into your soul and then your soul is gone knowing from being taught your whole life there is no making up for that what you are doing, you’re taught that your while life, but then even your mother is happy and proud because you lined up your sight posts and made people crumble and they were not getting up ever and yeah they might have been trying to kill you too, so you say, What are you going to do?, but really it doesn’t matter...you have seen all things die in more manners than you’d like to recall and for the whole thing fucking ravaged your spirit like some deep-down shit, man that you didn’t realize you had...everybody is so fucking happy to see you, the murder, the fucking accomplice, the at-bare-minimum bearer of some fucking responsibility, everyone ant to slap you on the back...you want to burn every goddamn yellow ribbon in sight, and you can’t explain it but it’s just, like, Fuck you, but then you signed up to go so it’s all your fault...(Powers 144 – 145)

The frustration and resentment with which Bartle holds himself accountable speaks to the deepest feelings of being “pissed off” (Dave 3). Powers’s stream of prose provides an insight that

interviews might not capture. Powers's expletives color Bartle's thoughts about every action that he took or let happen, presenting them as grave and deplorable. The pairing of "goddamn" and "yellow ribbons" creates an ironic image of support for heinous actions, at least in Bartle's perspective (Powers 145).

The monologue follows Bartle's return home and the death of his companion Murphy. Bartle focus on Murphy's absence and death ultimately Dismembers Murphy because to Bartle he is a burden of failure – not Bartle having promised to keep Murphy alive and failing sends him into this mental rampage of recalling every grim action he took as a failure or something to be scrutinized. Though, in his anger he states all that he has done or should have done "doesn't really matter" because "the one good thing" that Bartle "could have done, the one person [he] promised to would live is dead," dispelling all meaning and justification for his actions (Powers 144).

Bartle attributes his collection of failures to the same scared feeling, which Sterling had to cajole him into action. Bartle concedes to himself, "cowardice got you into this situation...and really deep down you know you went because you wanted to be a man and that's never gonna happen now...you're too much of a coward" (Powers 145). He blames his failed masculinity on the bullying and shame of his childhood, which taught him that men are respected when shame is a nonexistent feeling – thus he joined the Army for the manly environment and imperviousness of the warrior uniform. However, Bartle feels that he had made no progress in becoming a man because he still fears the outcome of his actions that he has taken and those yet to come.

Ultimately, Bartle's stream of consciousness is the culmination of observations and theory discussed throughout my investigation. American Exceptionalism is represented by people who welcome Bartle and express their gratitude blindly accept that all actions taken abroad are working towards protection and peace, and should be supported by slaps on the back and yellow ribbons. Bartle is Dismembered from his community of civilians because he does not reciprocate the proud feeling of his actions, and he is no longer a civilian. Also, he believes his cowardice prevents him from being a man, especially in the military – he is completely Dismembered. However, his sorrow expressed in irate words shows a “ghost of compassion” and recalling the lives that were revoked and the people not recognized as humans – the Dismembered – emphasized the importance of grieving and recognizing those people as members of humanity (Powers 14). Though, Bartle was a contributor to the Dismembering of the Iraqi people, his realizing his wrong allows for the Remembering of persons to the collective that is human.



## CONCLUSION

### The Pressure

My investigation lead me to conclude there are three main cultural pressures at the origins of dehumanization which allow for dehumanizing practices to persist in military culture. The first is a national culture – American Exceptionalism – that creates an American standard that insights a pressure for soldiers to bear as they are the extension of the country to other areas of the world. To be exceptional is to deny membership to the elite community, and turn Dismembers oneself. Some soldiers use the pressure to justify actions, and others recognize the pompous mentality and Remember those who were Dismembered. Next is a national subculture: hyper-masculinity. As discussed in chapters above, this call for manliness is not exclusively American, but is magnified in United States military, as is the third pressure. Women also strive to exude this impervious warrior mentality of manliness for membership into this exclusive group. However, manliness as a requisite to join this subpopulation leads the third pressure: not being vulnerable. This pressure is the one that calls for not exuding grief or mourning or cowardice. This pressure permeates the other two pressures because showing the capacity to Remember and grieve for the people as they are humans, refutes the sense of manliness and imperviousness emphasized in combat areas, and disenfranchises American Exceptionalism because a nation built by the people for the people cannot grieve for another that is inherently beneath them. Combining the three pressure creates an environment where dehumanizing persons is easier, perhaps more desirable, than being isolated from two communities and among the Dismembered.

## **Grieve and Mourn**

I find validity in Butlers' statement "we're undone by each other. And if we're missing something" (Butler 23). She uses former President George Bush's announcement on September 21 that "we have finished grieving and that *now* is the time for resolute action" to give context to her imploring,

when grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly (Butler 29 – 30).

She further explains that "in a way, we all live with this vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is a part of bodily life" and "we must attend to it" (Butler 31). Butler introduces that vulnerability and grieving are the keys to restructuring society, be more inclusive, recognize the humanity in others, and Remember the Dismembered.

## **Remembering**

Concluding my investigation, I derive a theory based on the oral histories and interviews from the *After Combat: The Voices Project*, and war literature, where the soldier remembers a significant moment or person(s) that was Dismembered. I call this theory Remember, and define the term similarly to Dismembered, as double entendre. The first component is mentally recalling and recognizing the moment of the change or the Dismembered person(s). Second, is the expression of grief, which enables the Dismembered person to reclaim their status as a

human and reenter into humanity as a member of the collective, thus re-member the Dismembered.

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